

## Agriculture Department Shows Its “Can Do” Spirit

After having its budget cut by nearly 20 percent the past two fiscal years, no one from the Governor’s Efficiency Review team was expecting significant efficiency contributions, at least for this fiscal year (’03-’04), from the state’s Department of Agriculture. But the agency responsible for the health and welfare of the state’s food and livestock likened itself to the locomotive in the children’s story “The Little Engine That Could.”

“We felt we were the underdog, because our agency is so small (250 employees),” said Agriculture’s Legislative Liaison, Rae Chornenky. “Then we said, ‘I’ll show you.’ ”

By quickly implementing a number of cost-saving measures — merging departments, cross-training, eliminating most state-funded travel, canceling use of cell phones, centralizing inventory and purchasing control — Agriculture estimated it would save nearly 10 percent of its \$10 million budget for FY ’03-’04, or about \$1 million.

John Caravetta, associate director of Agriculture’s Plant Services division, called ER “a continuing improvement process” that becomes contagious. “Employees know what needs to be changed and it feeds on itself, as other employees are not afraid to bring up other ideas (for saving),” Caravetta said.

Nearly three-fourths of the agency’s savings this fiscal year will come from department mergers and cross-training. An example of where cross-training has proved fruitful (pun intended) was in the workload for citrus, fruit and vegetable (CFV) field inspectors. In many cases, what used to take two or more field inspectors (using as many vehicles) to accomplish, now takes only one inspector and one vehicle.

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*John Caravetta, associate director of Agriculture’s Plant Services Division (right), hands over keys to 22 of his agency’s fleet vehicles to Randy Frost, administrator of Arizona Department of Administration Fleet Management department.*

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Dept. of Agriculture*

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In addition, Agriculture found that in many cases it’s cheaper to reimburse inspectors for using their own vehicles. The CVF program has returned three vehicles to the Department of Administration’s Fleet Management Office, saving Agriculture another \$14,000. All told, Agriculture expects to save nearly \$200,000 in fleet expenses in this fiscal year by returning 22 vehicles and a van to ADOA.

Another example of ingenuity came from relocating the Environmental Services division’s Yuma field office into several donated modular (pre-fabricated) units. Amount saved: \$40,000. Plus, by making payment on a \$39,000 invoice within 30 days saved Environmental Services another \$7,000.

ER’s primary goal is not only about cost cutting and becoming more efficient, but also entails finding additional revenue sources — either through federal, private, or nonprofit funds or through reasonable fees to recoup cost of services.

Although Agriculture severely cut back on training as part of its ER plan this fiscal year, the Office of the Director found it rewarding to have sent one staff member to training to learn how to identify and qualify for federal grants. For FY ’03-’04, Agriculture’s Animal Services division secured a \$463,000 federal grant for dairy and slaughterhouse inspections and is waiting to hear news on another \$147,000 grant.

“Although we’ve had staff cut (down about 120 positions in the past two years from layoffs and elimination of jobs),” Chornenky said, “we’re looking everywhere for funding sources — private, nonprofit and federal.

It sounds like Department of Agriculture is the “Little Engine That *Can and Does.*”



*Many of the 22 state vehicles returned by Agriculture to ADOA’s Fleet Services were pick-up trucks.*